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DE RUEHYN #2041/01 3131334  
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FM AMEMBASSY SANAA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3176  
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 002041

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FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [YM](#)  
SUBJECT: CAUGHT BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH, TAIZ CITIZENRY  
TOILS FOR REFORM, DEVELOPMENT

REF: A. SANAA 1309  
[1](#)B. SANAA 1687

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The residents of Taiz, Yemen's most populous governorate and the country's cultural and educational capital, share the same frustrations expressed by citizens across the country: a water crisis, economic woes and a crackdown on human rights such as freedom of the press. Unlike their secession-minded southern neighbors, militarized tribesmen east of Sana'a or the rebellious Houthis in the north, citizens in Taiz ) caught geographically and culturally between north and south ) are agitating for reform peacefully with a focus on grassroots action and civil society. Although Taiz's residents have thus far shown a disinclination towards violence, its burgeoning youth population and high unemployment rates coupled with severe resource shortages point to a future of instability. END SUMMARY.

IT'S THE ECONOMY, SALEH  
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[1](#)2. (C) The major concern's of Taiz's population, according to contacts PolOff met during a November 2-3 visit to the governorate, are water, economic problems and a perceived crackdown on human rights across Yemen. "The problems of Taiz are the problems of the whole country," Islah Taiz Chief Abdulhafez al-Fahd told PolOff on November 3. He added angrily that many families often go 16 or 17 days without access to water. The governorate's demographics are also a serious threat to its future stability and prosperity. Already the most populous of Yemen's governorates at over three million residents, it is also the fastest-growing, exacerbating existing water shortages and widespread unemployment. Charitable organizations fill in some of the gaps in government services, according to Shawki Ahmed Hayel Saeed, a prominent businessman of the Taiz-based Hayel Saeed family and head of the local councils, who said that in addition to his family's Hayel Saeed Charitable Association, the Islah Foundation also provides significant assistance. He said that Salafi charities active elsewhere in the country have a presence during the holy month of Ramadan, but seem to disappear the rest of the year.

A "MASSACRE" OF RIGHTS  
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[1](#)3. (C) According to local NGO Human Rights Training and Information Center (HRTIC), a lack of development ) such as the provision of basic services ) can be a human rights problem as well. "You have to have electricity to turn on your computer before you can start reading or blogging about news and human rights," HRTIC's Rasha Yahya told PolOff on November 2. Citizens also complained about the crackdown on freedom of the press in 2009. Despite the fact that no

Taiz-based newspapers were censored or closed during the year, Ghazi Abdulrahman al-Sami, a lawyer at HRTIC, said, "We felt the attack on press freedom this year like a massacre." Contacts also complained about the impact of lax legal enforcement on human rights and development. "Sure, Yemen has laws. But the real law depends on personalities, not what's on the books." Hayel Saeed complained that he had to personally call President Saleh to resolve minor issues regarding local government and development initiatives.

"TAIZ WILL NEVER BECOME VIOLENT LIKE THE SOUTH"

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¶4. (C) Frustrated with a lack of development and stagnant politics, Taiz's residents are using peaceful protest and focusing on civil society to agitate for reform. Backed by MEPI and UNDP funding, HRTIC is working to increase grassroots action and citizen participation, with a particular focus on the youth. On October 22, the new "Popular Movement for Justice and Change," headed by Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP) MP Sultan al-Samee, sparked headlines across the country when 20 people were arrested in downtown Taiz as security forces clamped down on a peaceful demonstration. The movement, founded by politicians, academics and intellectuals, is focused on development rather than politics. "Taiz will never become violent like the south," Hayel Saeed told PolOff on November 3. "Here, people write articles, they make speeches or they march. So, in October, they marched." While members of civil society and the media said that there was broad popular support for the movement, Hayel Saeed said, "People here grumble, but they do that everywhere." Hayel Saeed told PolOff that the major political focus was increasing local government authority; he

said Taiz was ready to govern itself if the ROYG's long-standing decentralization initiative was ever implemented. Opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) leaders in Taiz told PolOff that theirs was the first governorate to begin official discussion of the JMP's National Salvation Plan (Ref B). Unlike the southern opposition, the Taiz JMP argued for sweeping reform, not independence. Referring to the National Salvation Plan, head of Islah's Political Department in Taiz Ahmed Abdulmalik said, "The government accuses us of never having a vision for the country. Well, this is it."

COMMENT

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¶5. (C) Although the mood in Taiz is calmer than the mood in much of Yemen, the governorate's political and economic forecast is just as bleak. Taiz does not have the southerners' history of an independent state, nor is its urbane citizenry prone to violence like the well-armed tribesmen of the north and east. Caught between north and south, Taiz's residents are currently in a "wait and see" mode; they continue to walk a fine line between the "haves" in Sana'a and the "have-nots" of the restive south. Still, Saleh relies heavily on populous Taiz for commerce, trade, and quiet political support. He would do well to learn a lesson from the south and address the governorate's economic grievances before they become political. END COMMENT.

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